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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

Nigeria Under General Gowon

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Nigeria Under General Gowon

The Nigerian civil war, which ended in January 1970, settled the question of whether Africa's most populous country would be broken up by secession. The federal victory did not, however, resolve a number of more fundamental problems that lay dormant during the civil war but are now surfacing again. Tribalism, regionalism, and other sources of friction undermine Nigeria's hard-won unity. Nigeria's economy has benefited from an oil boom that has made the country the ninth-ranking producer in the world. The government has made important gains in its drive to increase both its take from oil and its control over production. In foreign affairs, the government is clearly more assertive than its predecessors in its efforts to carve out a leading role for Nigeria on the African continent.

General Gowon's government is popular, but criticism of inaction in domestic affairs has increased. Little has been done to reshape Nigeria's institutions or to prepare the country for a return to civilian rule, now scheduled for 1976. There has been slow adjustment on the local level to the new 12-state structure, which has diluted the power of the major tribes. In the background is the usual plethora of scheming politicians who have so far avoided a confrontation with the military government.

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General Gowon and his constituents

Gowon and His Leadership

The 36-year-old head of the federal military government has gathered experience and confidence since taking over the government in 1966. Gowon's major strength lies in his neutral and conciliatory image. As a minority tribesman and a Christian, he is not identified with any of the three major tribes: the Yorubas in the west, the Muslim Hausa-Fulanis in the north, or the Ibos in the east. Since taking over, Gowon has developed an important constituency among the minority tribesmen, who hold real power in the federal government through their control of senior positions in the army. Gowon appears to have widened this constituency in the past year. Something of a hero at the end of the war, he has garnered additional popular acceptance through speeches and widely publicized trips throughout Nigeria. Among Gowon's main advisers are a number of key civil servants, who are particularly important in economic matters.

Gowon is probably unsure about the best way to achieve his objectives. He sees himself as a mediator who operates by consensus, and he has on occasion been shouted down by his associates. A modest man who lives simply and reads the Bible daily, Gowon has the reputation of being relatively free from the corruption endemic in the Nigerian political system.

The most recurring domestic criticism of Gowon's leadership is that he is not making the hard and unpopular decisions that are necessary but is seeking to divert attention from pressing problems. Certainly, there has been drift in government leadership. Gowon designates no deputy while he is out of the country and all decisions have to await his return. This situation, added to the normally cumbersome workings of the Nigerian bureaucracy, means that things move slowly, when they move at all.

The Army

The 280,000-man army has been called Nigeria's thirteenth state. Any challenge to Gowon would have to come from within it, or from politicians who have links with army officers. There are rumors of coup plotting at irregular intervals, but the division commanders are personally loyal to Gowon; in addition, the large size of the army and its dispersal throughout the country would make it difficult to mount a successful coup.

There are no immediate plans for demobilization of the large force (it was 12,000 before the war) which costs the government more than \$1 million a day. The army is very much underemployed, but there have been only a few clashes with civilians. Most of these appear to have been spontaneous incidents.

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Reconciliation Policy

At the war's end, Lagos announced a conciliatory policy toward the Biafran secessionists, including the absorption of "misguided" army and police personnel and the reinstatement of civil servants. This policy has led to an impressive degree of reintegration and a near return to normalcy in the Ibo East-Central State. Several thousand former Biafran policemen have been reabsorbed, as have Ibo enlisted men and non-commissioned officers who wished to return to the army. A federal military tribunal that was set up to screen officers completed its work months ago, but thus far no army officers have been reabsorbed. Secessionist officers from Mid-West State—not originally a part of Biafra—are regarded as "traitors" and are still in prison, while Ibos from the East, officially considered "misled," have been allowed to return to civilian life. The highest ranking secessionist officer still in the country, Col. Effiong, has been allowed to return to his farm. Secessionist leader Ojukwu remains in Ivory Coast, where he has been prohibited from engaging in any overt political activity.

Over 3,000 civil servants of East-Central State origin have been reintegrated into the government. Some 50,000 Ibos have returned to northern Nigeria, where more than 350,000 lived before the war. For the most part, they have returned as wage earners rather than as entrepreneurs. The Ibos have been warmly welcomed back to the north, where they are very slowly regaining their property. The northerners apparently prefer them to the assertive Yorubas, who in many cases took the Ibos' place after the exodus. The Ibos have not been so fortunate in Rivers and Southeastern states where minority tribesmen, freed from Ibo domination by the outcome of the war, are determined to keep the Ibos out. In Rivers State, the Ibos have been unable to regain their valuable property in Port Harcourt, a predominantly Ibo city before the war.

On the whole, things are moving along well in Iboland. The state has one of the better functioning governments. Food shortages have ended, agricultural recovery is encouraging, and key businesses are being reactivated. The federal government has been generous in its aid to the East-Central State, allocating \$35 million for rehabilitation, in addition to direct payments of \$90 million to the state treasury. There are, however, still large numbers of unemployed and a shortage of capital.

There has been little political activity in Iboland. Ibo tribesmen have been preoccupied with rehabilitation, and little dissatisfaction—or even interest—in the state administration is evident. The most popular figure among the Ibos is the commissioner for economic development and reconstruction, Sam Ikoku, a well-known leftist



An embrace for Sir Louis Mbanefo former Chief Justice of Eastern Nigeria immediately after the collapse of secession, January 1970. Center is Lt.Col. Philip Effiong who formally renounced secession.

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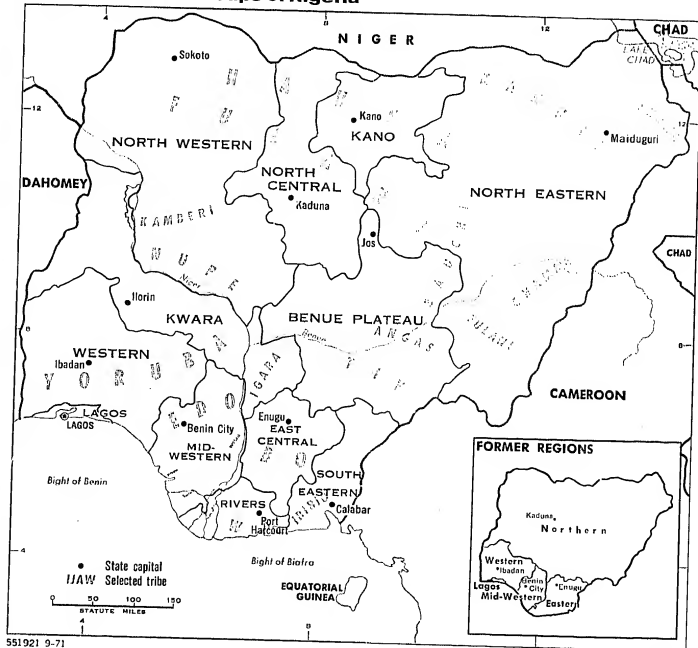
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States and Tribal Groups of Nigeria



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who spent the last years of the prewar civilian regime in Nkrumah's Ghana. Ikoku is adept at the game of tribal politics and, as the principal spokesman for Ibo interests, appears to be readying himself to go after a wider political constituency.

The North

The carving up of the old Northern Region into six states, which occurred in 1968, has broken the power of the Hausa-Fulani aristocracy over the minor tribes. It has also set in motion a chain of events that will ultimately shift most power from these traditional leaders to the state governments. The emirs and chiefs retain enormous influence, but they have been stripped of all important powers except local taxation and control over primary school education. They are allowed to keep 80 percent of the taxes they collect. In addition, federal funds for development are being channeled into new organs of government, which are taking over many of the aristocracy's old functions.

The momentum with which these changes are taking place varies greatly from state to state, but is slow everywhere. Some powerful emirs in the far north have been able to circumvent reforms, and there has not been much real change so far in local government personnel. A struggle appears to be developing between young, educated civil servants and those clustered around the traditional rulers. Because many of the reformers are themselves part of the feudal social structure, there is always the possibility of backsliding.

Although the pace of change is uncertain, the old solid north is gone. Each of the state capitals now faces toward Lagos, rather than Kaduna, the old regional capital. The few common services the states share will probably be terminated in a year. Nevertheless, a psychological consciousness of "north" as opposed to "south" probably still exists and will tend to haunt Nigeria for some time to come. Northerners recognize the fact that they are far behind south-

erners in education and economic development, and they are quick to complain if they think they are being discriminated against. A group of northerners, in fact, has bitterly criticized the four-year plan for being "socialist," "southern," and not sufficiently cognizant of "northern sensitivities."

The Economic Picture

Nigeria's economic prospects are good, but the country faces a number of problems typical to Africa: inflation, unemployment, endemic corruption, and a serious shortage of managerial skills. Price inflation—severe since the end of the war—appears to be subsiding somewhat as a result of an increased supply of goods from liberalized imports and the current harvest. Another inflationary spiral may occur, however, if cost-of-living salary and wage increases now being considered by the government are granted. The foreign exchange situation is improving.

Booming oil production continues to be the brightest spot: production is running at 1.5 million barrels per day. The government has made important gains in its drive to increase both its take from oil and its control over production. New financial terms, negotiated with the oil companies last spring, combined with anticipated output of about 1.7 million barrels per day by the end of the year, could push government revenues as high as \$900 million this year compared with \$300 million last year. If military expenditure—now accounting for over a third of federal spending—does not increase too much, there should be a small surplus for development needs.

The military government has announced an ambitious four-year economic development program that includes planned investments of almost \$4.5 billion. It has set up a national oil company that will play a major role in future exploration, production, and marketing. Nigeria recently joined the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and can be expected to exact price increases similar to those granted to other member countries; it has also demanded majority

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participation in all new oil ventures. In a further nationalistic thrust, the government has reserved certain businesses exclusively for Nigerians.

The military government had some trouble at the beginning of the year with labor unrest and student protests. For a while it looked as if the students and unions might make common cause, a prospect that rattled the government. The situation is now calm, although there could be further strikes and demonstrations later this year by groups disgruntled with proposed wage and salary increases.

The Return to Civilian Rule

Last year on the tenth anniversary of Nigerian independence, Gowon announced a nine-point program for a return to civilian rule in 1976. The program extended the ban on politics and called for several time-consuming procedures, including a new constitution and a census. The thorny issue of adding new states to the present 12-state structure—which some tribes want and others oppose—was put off until 1974.

One year after Gowon's announcement, virtually no progress has been made in carrying out the program. The prospect of five more years of military rule has generated little open opposition. There has been press criticism and some grumbling from former politicians, most of whom have been skulking on the safer stage of state rather than national politics. Although political parties are banned, several ex-politicians have been quietly building their local bases. For the most part, they have been using the informal organizations or network of contacts that existed before the war.

Behind-the-scenes political activity is highest in Western State, home of the Yorubas, who are inveterate political maneuverers. The most public

politicking surfaces in the newspapers of the state's former political parties; when the Action Group's daily takes a position, it is assumed that Chief Awolowo, leader of the Yoruba, is speaking. Awolowo, who was the highest ranking civilian in the government until his resignation last June, has been quiet over the past few months but no one believes he has given up his political ambitions. The 62-year-old Awolowo, however, has so many enemies that his chances of winning the leadership of an eventual civilian government seem remote. His Action Group, based largely on the personal followings of various leaders among Yoruba subgroups, is probably the best organized of the former political parties and has managed to establish some influence within the civil service.

In northern Nigeria, a number of old-line politicians have been meeting to discuss matters of common interest. Small, informal groups have also coalesced around minority interest groups like the various tribal separatist movements. On the whole, however, the politicians are biding their time and avoiding a frontal attack on military rule.

Foreign Affairs

General Gowon has been carving out a more activist role for Nigeria in African affairs. In a series of successful state visits to African countries, he has pressed for regional economic ties and for the reconciliation of differences. Nigeria has resumed relations with two of the African countries that supported Biafra during the war—Tanzania and Zambia—and re-established contacts with the other Biafran supporters—Gabon and Ivory Coast. Nigeria's influence has also been felt within the councils of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), where the country clearly intends to play a leading role.

At the same time, Nigeria has adopted a more militant African nationalist line, drawing

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General Gowon with President Hamani Diori of Niger

closer to those African countries considered in the "progressive" camp. Gowon is one of the leading opponents of Black African dialogue with white-ruled South Africa. At an OAU summit meeting last June, he went a step further and

called for the "liberation of at least one colonial territory within three years." Gowon's rhetoric, probably designed to increase Nigeria's stature as a leader in the struggle against Africa's white redoubt, fits well with the idea that Nigeria, as Africa's most populous country, must be "a banner of hope and an instrument of achieving self-respect for the black man"—a recurrent theme in propaganda out of Lagos.

Nigeria has so far not given much backing to the African liberation movements, but it can be expected to step up its material and propaganda support. There are indications that plans are under way to furnish material assistance to the Portuguese Guinean insurgents, who are currently using Guinea as a base, and to the Angolan liberation movement.

The Soviet Union, which improved its image during the war through its support of the federal government, has not been able to consolidate its position. Nigerian military leaders have never been enthusiastic about expanding ties with the Communists, and recent links uncovered between left-wing trade union officials and the Soviet Embassy may make them even more cautious. The USSR has extended a \$6.7-million credit for geological prospecting, and an extensive Soviet geological survey has begun in the north. Despite pressure from the USSR to get the army and air force to procure Soviet equipment, no new major items have been received. In keeping with its policy of balancing East and West, Nigeria this year recognized Peking, but the federal leaders' natural affinities remain with the West.

There is a residual sensitivity in Nigerian-US relations resulting from the belief that the US gave moral, if not material, support to the Biafran secessionists, but Gowon wants good relations with the US. US companies have some \$500 million invested in Nigeria and larger commitments are planned. Expatriate and foreign

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business interests must expect, however, to encounter some prickliness from Nigerians because of a growing feeling on their part that a certain number of businesses should be reserved for Nigerians and that the number of expatriates should be reduced.

Nigeria's pursuit of an assertive and nationalistic foreign policy will of course depend in large

part on a relatively quiet domestic front. It is highly unlikely that the present military government can resolve Nigeria's peacetime problems within the timetable it has set for itself. Nigerian tolerance is high, however, and the military government will probably be able to stay in power at least for the next year or two.

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